Dave McClure – 1950-2018

Dave McClure

Lake Tahoe's ultimate maître d' has died. David Alan McClure was special and one of a kind.

He died Feb. 24, 2018, of organ failure at Renown Medical Center in Reno. He was 67.

In a 2012 story about Mr. McClure in *Lake Tahoe News* he said, "My job is to change people's experiences. You never know who will be standing in front of you. People plan their whole vacations around who they can see and when they can see them."

Mr. McClure moved to the mountains in 1979 when the Park Tahoe Hotel opened, which then became Caesars Tahoe and eventually MontBleu, where he has worked for 36 years and had been maître d' of the showroom.

On Oct. 7, 1950, he became the first born child of Charles and Florence Engstrom McClure or Martinez, Calif. They moved to San Francisco where they lived in the student housing Quonset huts while his father got his teaching degree. Four years later they moved to San Anselmo where the family lived in an Asian pagoda style home until 2016.

As a child, Mr. McClure participated in many sports and Boy Scouts. He graduated from Sir Francis Drake High School in 1968. He then attended College of Marin, University of Hawaii and UC Davis, where he was a student and teacher of histology.

While in Davis, Mr. McClure had three consecutive days off, which enabled him to have his first ski pass at Squaw Valley in 1971. He immediately became a mountain man. He decided not to pursue a medical degree, and spent two years at City College of San Francisco where he earned a degree in hotel and restaurant management. While in San Francisco, he worked at the St. Francis Hotel on Union Square. Then he worked for a short time at the new MGM Grand in Reno.

He was a lifelong fan of the San Francisco Giants, 49ers and Warriors.

Mr. McClure had a huge circle of close friends and acquaintances who have great memories of skiing and hiking in Tahoe, and a crew of "salty dogs" that spent hours plying the waters of Tahoe on the sailboat he and his boat partners owned and enjoyed. Being his friend was a gift of love and enormous generosity never to be forgotten.

He is survived by his four younger siblings: Patricia, Glenn, Carol and Donald, and their children, as well as his cousins in the North Bay, Judy, Kenny, Clayton, Linda, Robert and Joanne; as well as his legion of friends.

A burial service will be on April 5 at 11am at Valley Memorial Park, 650 Bugeia Lane, Novato.

SLT residents try to find answers to housing issues

By Kathryn Reed

Solutions to South Lake Tahoe's housing woes were in short supply during a talk about the issue on Wednesday.

Mayor Wendy David’s monthly gathering was focused on housing last week, with planning staff (Kevin Fabino and John Hitchcock) there to provide the bulk of the information.

“There are a lot of things we could potentially do, but we need to always remember what TRPA will allow,” Fabino told the group gathered at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center on March 21. What he didn’t share is what the city would/could do if the bi-state regulatory agency weren’t in the picture.

One of the reasons the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency was created in the 1960s was to stop local jurisdictions from unregulated growth, especially after the most sensitive marsh in the basin was paved over to create the Tahoe Keys – in South Lake Tahoe.

Fabino and David pointed to the successes of turning some of the rundown hotels into more livable residential units.

“It’s a good short-term solution. I’m not sure it’s a long-term answer,” Fabino said.

To build affordable housing as it’s defined by the state where income needs to be verified and units are deed restricted is actually more expensive to build than market rate housing because of all the state requirements.

Land is a premium in the basin. Then there are the costs to do business. Of the $60,000 in development fees the city collects, only $6,300 of that is the actual building permit fee. The rest is money that goes to other entities like the TRPA, sewer-water district, schools and air quality mitigation.

Heidi Hill Drum, who runs the Tahoe Prosperity Center, said that is why it would be better to look at assessing fees based on the square footage of a structure instead of a flat fee.

South Tahoe Public Utility District has reduced its sewer connection fee. That board is now contemplating allowing sewer hookups to be transferred, which would reduce the cost of construction.

Others at the talk advocated for businesses to provide housing for workers.

A representative from Heavenly Mountain Resort said of the approximately 1,500 winter employees the ski resort has there are beds for 72. This housing is at the bottom of Keller Road.

A former city worker suggested creating a higher transient occupancy tax for vacation home rentals and then using that money to create work force/affordable housing.

Someone else suggested dorm-style housing for workers. This is done at the CCC building in Meyers.

Calif. housing bill has people freaking out

By Matt Levin, CalMatters

Memes of a mild-mannered California legislator photoshopped as a Star Trek villain. A San Francisco supervisor suggesting the city should sue the state, to “thunderous applause.” Wealthy Marin County homeowners and South Los Angeles tenants’ rights groups working as political bedfellows.

All inspired by a wonky state housing bill yet to receive a single vote—and faces tough odds of passing the Legislature.

SB827, sponsored by state Sen. Scott Wiener, a Democrat from

San Francisco, tries to force cities to build more dense housing around public transit hubs. The bill has received a remarkable level of media attention both within California and nationally, providing fodder for think pieces from *Slate, Vox, Boston Globe, Bloomberg* and *New York Times*—which called it a "bold, divisive plan to wean Californians from cars."

That attention has only amplified a loud and acrimonious debate over how the bill would transform California cities. Proponents see the bill as a radical and necessary step for the state to solve its endemic housing shortage and meet its ambitious climate change goals. Opponents see it as a blunt overreach of state power that would destroy the character of local communities while displacing long-established residents so developers could build more luxury condo towers for rich people.

Here are four things you should know about California's most controversial housing bill in decades:

This isn't hype. If it becomes law, the bill could really revolutionize California cities.

As currently written, SB 827 would essentially exempt all new housing built within half a mile of a train stop or quarter mile of a frequent bus stop from most local zoning rules. So, if a city had zoned an area for single-family homes, developers could invoke the bill to build multifamily apartment buildings between four and eight stories high. It would also free those projects from parking requirements and other zoning rules frequently abused by cities to impede new development.

How much area in major California cities would fall under the bill? That's what makes this so radical. Preliminary analysis by the San Francisco Planning Department shows that basically all—yes, all—of San Francisco and huge swaths of Los Angeles would lose their local zoning regulations. Ninety percent of

San Francisco’s residential parcels would have a higher height limit for new development under the bill.

A more rigorous analysis of just how much developers would take advantage of the bill, and how it would apply to smaller California cities, has not yet been conducted. But the potential is huge.

For decades, urbanists across the state have have longed for the type of density SB827 would bring. Despite major push back from some quarters of his home city that San Francisco would become unrecognizable should the bill become law, Wiener has stressed that such density is good for cities like San Francisco, and the most effective way to combat the region’s astronomical housing prices.

Many environmentalists love this bill

Proponents of SB827 say it has two primary goals: 1) to increase the supply of housing and thereby lower housing prices, and 2) to reduce greenhouse gas emissions that cause climate change.

Urban planning academics and climate change activists argue the state can only meet its climate change goals—a 40 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by the year 2030—if it succeeds in getting people out of their cars and onto public transportation closer to where they work. Alternative energy sources and cleaner-burning power plants can only go so far: The leading cause of emissions nationally is the tailpipe. Building tons of housing in major job centers close to good transit seems like a sensible and necessary solution, they argue.

But at least one prominent environmental group with a tradition of opposing new development has balked at the measure. Angering many climate change activists, California’s Sierra Club has argued the bill would only create more local hostility to future transportation projects and would displace low-income residents.

Anti-gentrification groups argue that communities whose residents have lower incomes are much more likely to ride a bus or take a subway to work than commuters who earn more money. If lower-income residents are exiled to the suburbs as a consequence of the bill, its success at cutting carbon emissions will be muted at best.

Anti-gentrification and tenants' rights groups not so much

Advocates for lower-income renters and urban communities of color have greeted SB827 with a mixture of skepticism and hostility. A group of prominent Los Angeles anti-gentrification and civil rights groups signed onto a letter opposing the bill last month on the grounds that it lacked sufficient protections for renters whose apartments could be demolished to make way for newer, bigger, market-rate projects. They also expressed the broader fear that "opening the floodgates" around transit corridors would mean rents around shiny new developments would rise out of reach of current residents.

Wiener has addressed some of those concerns by amending the bill to include fairly strict renter protections. Developers who wish to demolish a renter-occupied unit would have to pay for the moving and living expenses of tenants for more than three years, and renters would have the right to move back into the new development at their old rent.

But the changes have yet to attract broad support from major housing equity groups, who fear the larger gentrification pressures possibly unleashed from the bill. It also didn't help that backers of SB827 waited until after the bill's announcement to try to court those groups' endorsement.

The bill faces a very tough road in the Legislature—a road that goes through Marin County

Bills that override local zoning control are rarely popular in the California Legislature. Homeowners in many regions of the state are, by and large, not thrilled with the idea of new apartment complexes going up next door over their objections. Homeowners are also more likely to vote than renters—a fact state legislators are acutely aware of.

Cities and counties are stealth power players in Sacramento, and are also not fans of having their zoning power stripped away. Up and down the state, mayors, city council members and county supervisors have come out against the bill, including Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Last year, lawmakers passed a handful of laws that encroached on the traditional zoning power of cities. But that housing package took a herculean effort to enact after years of failure, and importantly included new funding sources for subsidized housing, as well as tenants' protections that attracted support from a wide coalition of housing groups. And the zoning process changes brought by those laws pale in comparison to what SB 827 could do.

Nowhere has opposition to state interference in local planning decisions been as fierce as in Marin County, an affluent northern suburb in the Bay Area. If the bill is to receive a full vote of the Legislature, it will first have to clear a committee controlled by Sen. Mike McGuire, a Democrat who represents Marin. McGuire could prevent the bill from moving past his desk and receiving a vote.

Tahoe resorts rejoice after

week of storms

Tahoe area resorts would prefer snow dumps early in the season rather than late. Photo/Sierra-at-Tahoe

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Just in time for spring break, the late-season “atmospheric river” that dumped snow across the Sierra this week has ski resorts going from “waa” to “whoa!”

After below-average precipitation to start the season, the “miracle” storm may result in one of the snowiest Marches on record.

While ski resorts with deep pockets can buffer the impact of a weak winter with a sophisticated snow-making operation, none can escape the financial impact.

Read the whole story

Barton employs device to help needle-shy patients

Nurse Ken Harvey is a believer in Buzzy helping needle-phobic patients. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

For those who fear needles, there is no such thing as a simple little pin prick. It may end in a fainting episode which can ruin the rest of the day – where sleep is the only remedy to return to normal.

Health officials estimate at least 10 percent of the population has some form of needle phobia, also known as beonephobia. It was in 1997 that the phobia was recognized in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.

For those with extreme fear of needles it might mean avoiding getting the flu shot, other vaccinations or even having routine blood work done. It might also mean keeping one's child away from needles as well.

"You need to make the first experience a non-painful experience," said Ken Harvey, a registered nurse in the radiology department at Barton Memorial Hospital. "You should use a distraction the first time."

If it's a bad first experience, it's possible the child will have issues as an adult where anxiety and apprehension are the norm around needles.

Barton this year started to use Buzzys as a way to distract patients from what is going on. They are clinically tested devices that have been around for a handful of years.

According to the Buzzy website, studies show the device reduces pain 56 to 88 percent of the time. They are battery operated and reusable after being cleaned.

"We put Buzzy between the brain and the pain," Harvey told *Lake Tahoe News*. It's placed a few centimeters higher than the insertion point.

In the short time Harvey been using it on patients – and he has only had adult patients – it has worked "extremely well" at least 90 percent of the time.

The concept is rather simple. The black and yellow device is designed to look like a bumble bee and then has a gentle buzzing sound, which is the vibration part of the device. The tiny blue ice pack resembles wings, and acts to numb the area. (There are Buzzys that look like lady bugs, too.)

The vibration stimulates the nerves, sending impulses to the brain. The end result is the patient is distracted, remains calm and is able to receive the injection without negative consequences.

Barton has seen such success with the Buzzys that more are being ordered for its various offices.

Students, women, teachers embrace activism

By David Crary, AP

Suddenly, America is on the march.

Saturday’s March for Our Lives, planned for Washington and hundreds of other locations, is just the most recent sign that an extraordinary number of Americans are taking to heart the old truism that democracy should not be a spectator sport.

In numbers not seen since the tumult of the 1960s and ’70s, multitudes are venturing off the sidelines and into the game in a remarkable surge of political and social activism. Their ranks include high school students angered by gun violence, teachers fed up with low pay, and women energized by a range of grievances — notably pervasive sexual harassment and the longtime dominance of men in political power.

Read the whole story

Budget deal includes wildfire

disaster fund to end borrowing

By Matthew Daly, AP

A spending bill approved by the House includes a bipartisan plan to create a wildfire disaster fund to help combat increasingly severe wildfires that have devastated the West in recent years.

The bill sets aside more than $20 billion over 10 years to allow the Forest Service and other federal agencies end a practice of raiding non-fire-related accounts to pay for wildfire costs, which approached $3 billion last year.

The House approved the measure Thursday, with Senate action expected soon after as Congress faces a Friday night deadline to avoid a partial government shutdown.

Read the whole story

Money tight in EDC as budget talks about to start

El Dorado County CAO Don Ashton on March 21 talks finances. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

MEYERS – Out of a $550 million annual budget the El Dorado County Board of Supervisors only gets to decide how a fraction of that is spent. It's the approximately $150 million General Fund that they have a say over. The rest is state and federal money that has strings attached.

And even though $150 million is a lot of money, it's not enough to do everything people in the county would like done.

"It is not possible to be small and rural, with low taxes and high levels of service. You get to pick two out of three. It's all about choices," CAO Don Ashton said.

Ashton is making the rounds through the county, speaking to groups and at town halls to give a glimpse into the county's finances. Budget hearings for the 2018-19 fiscal year begin in April, with the preliminary budget taking effect July 1.

While other gatherings have been well attended, the one in

Meyers on March 21 was somewhat of a bust. There were three employees of Lake Valley Fire Protection District and a former South Lake Tahoe City Council member in attendance. Still, the intimate setting allowed for a free flow of dialogue.

Unfunded mandates from the state continue to escalate and therefore drain the precious resources. The prison realignment from 2011 has people in the jails who are doing time well past the one-year maximum that county jails were designed for. These are more hardened criminals. Counties are feeling the financial burden.

“The biggest and scariest issue is CalPERS,” Ashton said.

Retirement costs through CalPERS is escalating, with the hit to the county estimated to be another $20 million in the next four years. Ashton described it as being “out of our control for the immediate future.”

Only the state Legislature can do something to change the system.

The county’s unfunded liability is $160 million.

“How we get through these next few years will be scary,” Ashton said.

Obligations surrounding mental health also take a toll on the county’s budget. Per state law counties must provide mental health services. However, what comes from the state is not enough to cover all the bills.

And if a local resident has to be housed in a facility outside El Dorado County because there isn’t a bed here, local taxpayers foot that bill.

El Dorado County is also being hurt by the state gas tax not producing as much revenue as was forecast. And if voters repeal it in November, it’s possible the county could lose about $5 million a year in anticipated revenue.

If the robust economy takes a turn, that, too, would be bad for county coffers. This is because taxes make up 71 percent of the General Fund revenue, with property taxes being 62 percent of that total. For every dollar people pay in property tax, the county gets about 23 percent.

During the Great Recession property values plummeted and the county suffered.

The electeds have contemplated increasing various taxes to generate income. All tax proposals must go to the voters.

A half-cent sales tax could generate $6 million a year. Today the rate is 7.25 percent in the county. This compares to South Lake Tahoe’s rate of 7.75 percent.

Raising the hotel tax from 10 to 12 percent is being studied, though transient occupancy tax is not a huge piece of the pie at $3.4 million a year. Still, the rate is lower than the county’s neighbors. South Lake Tahoe charges 12 or 14 percent depending on the location.

Supervisor Sue Novasel, who was at Wednesday’s meeting, has brought up the idea of assessing TOT at campgrounds, just like South Lake Tahoe and other jurisdictions do. She has gotten push back on the West Slope.

What is unique about the county is that 5 percent off the top of all TOT collection goes to the Veterans Commission, then it’s divvied up with 49 percent going to the General Fund and 51 percent to tourism/economic development. There is talk of taking the veterans out of the TOT pot and instead making that allocation a separate line item in the General Fund. This way if the TOT is raised, that group is not getting an automatic increase.

Novasel is a proponent of there being a nexus between a tax and what it is then spent on. Veterans and TOT don’t fit that qualification.

Most of the General Fund money goes to law and justice (sheriff, district attorney, probation) at 58 percent, or $74 million. Of that the sheriff's office gets the bulk – 68 percent, or $51 million.

That figure doesn't include the $60 million state-of-the-art facility that will break ground this month. It will cost the county about $2.6 million a year for 40 years to pay for it. Where that will be in future budgets remains to be seen.

Supervisors only have control over the dollar amount in the sheriff's budget, not how he spends it. He's asking for four more deputies even though he has 14 vacancies.

Experts: Wet weather great, but no 'Miracle March'

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

It has all the earmarks of a "Miracle March" – heavy dousings of rain, intense flurries of snow in the Sierra mountains and roadway havoc – but the showy display of stormy weather across California this week isn't fooling the experts.

Despite encouraging signs, including a Sierra snowpack that has risen to respectability from record-breakingly meager depths this month, meteorologists say California will almost certainly emerge from the winter drier than normal.

"I would call it a very helpful March," said Daniel Swain, a climate scientist at UCLA. "It has brought us up from the bottom of the barrel in a lot of places, but it is not close to" a miracle recovery. "It may not actually increase the snowpack at all."

Read the whole story

Leagues, casinos lobby states for cut of legal sports bets

By Ben Nuckols, AP

WASHINGTON — With the Supreme Court poised to rule on a case that could end the federal ban on sports gambling, more than a third of U.S. states are considering legislation to get in on the action, and professional leagues and casino interests are lobbying against each other for the biggest cut of the winnings.

The push to legalize betting on sports has already led to fractures in an uneasy alliance that had developed between leagues and gambling legalization advocates before Supreme Court arguments last fall.

The NBA and Major League Baseball have been asking states to give them 1 percent of the total amount wagered on their games, calling it an "integrity fee" so they can protect their products and snuff out attempts at cheating and game-fixing.

Read the whole story